

would have imprisoned me for the picture if I had told them about the actual contents," Tatyana wryly comments. Her picture was inspired by the seven dissidents who had stepped out onto Red Square in 1968 in protest against the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. Paradoxically after she received the Komsomol Prize her friends stopped talking to her. "Their attitude was: 'Since you got the Komsomol Prize, that means you're the worst of scoundrels."

In the Baltic republics, which attained independence first, artists had always enjoyed more freedom, for example, political themes could be treated allusively, although they were warned: "No contacts with Moscow or Leningrad." In the work, *Jüri's Struggle with the Dragon* (1979), Estonian artist Jüri Arrak subconsciously sensed the impending demise of the Soviet empire, although he never thought the Dragon would perish in his lifetime. In *The Last Snow* (1988), an allusion to the burgeoning independence movement, the colors of the Estonian flag are used symbolically to depict a winter landscape of blue sky, black people and white snow. Arrak notes: "It's a symbol of the last winter before the spring of freedom. Snow is melting."

In 1991 Arrak executed a series on the collapse of the Soviet Union. Sitting in his loft in the old city of Tallinn Arrak is surrounded by his paintings, *Between the Walls* (1991), and *The Vision* (1991) (executed in the wake of the August Putsch) and *Behind the Wall* (1992), which mirror the conditions of uncertainty and anxiety caused by the foundering of this empire. Arrak comments: "The walls in my paintings represent the Kremlin walls. They are collapsing and behind the walls the monster—symbolizing the Soviet Union and Soviet imperialism—is disintegrating... When a vast empire collapses many conflicts arise, and the repercussions can be tragic. Nevertheless my works, *Behind the Wall* and *Between the Wall* are optimistic: it's a positive development that the walls are coming down."

In the Republic of Tatarstan, which suffered the ravages of Soviet rule for over seven decades, local artist Akhsan Fatkhutdinov, from the industrial city of Nizhnekamsk, in his series *Protect*, depicts the depredations of Stalin, as well as the eco-



*After A Raid*, 1938, Pavel Filonov, The Russian Museum, St. Petersburg

logical devastation of the fifties, sixties and seventies when Tatar villages and lands were destroyed to make way for huge industrial cities.

The relationship of the artist vs the state in the Soviet Union shows that in an atmosphere of constrained freedom, although the Muse is sacrificed at the altar of Mass Conformity, in the end the artist emerges victorious on the battlefield of ideology. When all the avenues of expression are closed, the artist, forced

to turn inward, is cast as both chronicler and philosopher, priest and prophet. The quest for the Holy Grail becomes the artist's very own patrimony.

Alexandra George's most recent work is called *Escape From 'Ward Six: Russia Facing Past And Present* (University Press of America, Md, July 1998. 761 pp. 198 photos and illustrations). She has just completed a book on Kazakhstan, *Journey into Kazakhstan*, as well as an art book, *Artists of Kazakhstan*



*The Last Snow*, 1988, Jüri Arrak, Tallinn, Estonia